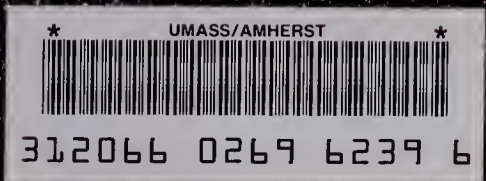


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**Preliminary Report:**  
**Department of Revenue's**  
**Child Support Enforcement Division**  
**(DOR/CSE)**

GOVERNMENT DOCUMENT  
COLLECTION

September, 1999



The House Committee on Joint Audit and Oversight  
and the  
Joint Audit and Oversight Committee







*Commonwealth of Massachusetts*

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**HOUSE POST AUDIT  
AND  
OVERSIGHT BUREAU**

ROOM 146

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STATE HOUSE

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BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02133-1053

**Preliminary Report:  
Department of Revenue's  
Child Support Enforcement Division  
(DOR/CSE)**

September, 1999

GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS  
COLLECTION

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**DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE: CHILD SUPPORT**  
**ENFORCEMENT DIVISION**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The House Post Audit and Oversight Bureau ("the Bureau"), at the direction of the House Post Audit and Oversight Committee ("the Committee"), conducted a preliminary examination of the Department of Revenue's ("DOR") Child Support Enforcement Division ("CSE"). The review was prompted by a significant increase in the number of constituents contacting their Representatives with problems encountered with DOR/CSE.

In order to ascertain the nature of these constituent complaints, the Bureau surveyed all 160 Representatives. The survey response rate was over 29%. The majority of the problems cited in the survey revolved around unresolved cases, misapplication of payments, incorrect levies, case backlog, and the Voice Response System, a "hotline" with an extensive waiting period and staff that was unable to significantly assist a customer. Additionally, the Bureau met with DOR/CSE leadership, management and staff, conducted site visits, and interviewed selected DOR constituents.

The Bureau acknowledges the complexity and difficulty of the job that DOR/CSE performs. One of its most significant difficulties is that at least 25% of DOR/CSE's caseload involves out-of-state obligors. However, the Bureau found several areas in which DOR/CSE could concentrate its efforts to streamline its operations and become more responsive to the constituents it is meant to assist. For one, DOR/CSE's new computer system, Commonwealth of Massachusetts Enforcement Tracking System ("COMETS"), while allowing for a more thorough case-tracking ability than the previous system, has also made answering routine phone calls more cumbersome by requiring repetition of identifying information, increasing the number of frames needed to view the appropriate information, and having a slow response time while moving to and from multiple frames. CSE caseworkers interviewed by the Bureau noted that their manual calculations were often more accurate than those developed by COMETS. DOR/CSE's recent hiring of 51 full-time employees at the Customer Service Bureau is a step in the right direction.

Another frustration voiced by Representatives was their inability to fully discuss a constituent's case with DOR/CSE's Problem Resolution Office due to privacy constraints. The HPAO Chairman recommended that DOR/CSE create a release form that a constituent can complete if the constituent wishes a legislator to work with the Problem Resolution office on his or her behalf. DOR/CSE has since implemented this suggestion.

DOR/CSE has a difficult but important mission to collect and disburse payments that provide for the children in the Commonwealth. While many strides have been made



to improve this service, the Bureau believes that there are several other areas that need to be addressed to bring the service to a level that DOR/CSE's customers should receive.





# **MASSACHUSETTS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

## **Post Audit and Oversight Bureau**

### **DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE: CHILD SUPPORT** **ENFORCEMENT DIVISION**

#### **FINDINGS**

1. DOR currently lacks authority to compromise support claims; this is currently the exclusive province of the Probate Court.
2. DOR/CSE obligors in 25% of non-AFDC cases make payments directly to custodial parent in violation of the standard probate court support order.
3. DOR/CSE does not utilize electronic banking as a means to collect and disburse support payments.
4. DOR/CSE is currently unable to refund incorrectly deducted obligor amounts.
5. DOR/CSE lacks a uniform payment disbursement policy. Some payments are disbursed weekly, while others are made monthly.
6. DOR/CSE has encountered and continues to encounter difficulties in the collection of out-of-state support payments, especially among the larger states.
7. DOR/CSE Commonwealth of Massachusetts Enforcement Tracking System ("COMETS") continues to experience difficulties causing it to be less than fully supportive of DOR/CSE's mission.
8. DOR/CSE's client satisfaction survey, conducted by a consultant, is less than adequate.
9. DOR/CSE lacks the capacity to coordinate the delivery of social services to its clients, as well as ensuring adequate information exchange among these social service agencies.
10. DOR/CSE lacks sufficient training programs for its staff around mission and function as well as stress reduction for hotline workers.
11. DOR/CSE lacks a client information initiative to inform about CSE's mission and function.
12. DOR/CSE's Problem Resolution Office is understaffed.



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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. DOR/CSE should be given the authority to compromise support claims in order to facilitate the collection and payment of support.
2. DOR/CSE should through public awareness as well as other means ensure that payments in non-AFDC cases are made to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and not directly to the custodial parent.
3. DOR/CSE should consider instituting electronic banking for collection and disbursement of support payments to ensure greater certainty of payments as well as their accuracy. This could be especially helpful for garnished wages, allowing the employer to deposit directly into the CSE designated bank account.
4. DOR/CSE should develop a mechanism to allow refunding of incorrectly deducted amounts for obligors.
5. DOR/CSE ought to decide on a uniform calendar for child support payment disbursements. A 52-week calendar seems to satisfy both Probate Court orders which may be written mandating weekly payments, as well as DOR/CSE preferences for monthly payments (i.e., the monthly order could be multiplied by twelve and then divided by 52).
6. DOR/CSE should increase its efforts to facilitate the collection of support payments from out-of-state obligors. Strategies need to be devised for this purpose, especially with states which have proven most problematic (e.g. Florida, California).
7. DOR/CSE should commission a more thorough client satisfaction survey, with a larger population sample.
8. DOR/CSE should strongly consider designating interagency liaisons to coordinate information as well as the delivery of social services to CSE clients from among the Commonwealth's social service agencies including DMH, DTA, and DSS.
9. DOR/CSE should continue to implement training efforts aimed at ensuring uniformity of responses to CSE client requests for information.
10. DOR/CSE should continue and expand programs for hotline staff, aimed at reducing stress and improving conflict resolution skills.
11. DOR/CSE should undertake a client information program to make CSE clients aware of CSE's mission and function.
12. DOR/CSE should consider augmenting the staff of its Problem Resolution Office (PRO), to enable it to handle a larger percentage of cases.
13. DOR/CSE ought to intensify its efforts to make COMETS more user responsive and operate in a manner which supports and facilitates the agency mission.





## **BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY**

Having been contacted repeatedly by constituents, numerous members of the House of Representatives apprised the House Post Audit and Oversight Committee about difficulties encountered at the Massachusetts Department of Revenue's Child Support Enforcement Division (DOR/CSE). As a consequence, the House Post Audit and Oversight Bureau (the "Bureau") devised a survey to elicit specific information from House members about the nature of these constituent complaints regarding DOR. The survey (see Exhibit 1) was sent to all 160 Representatives. The Bureau received in excess of 29% in response from House Members. Responses were analyzed and aggregated. Follow-up interviews were conducted with Members where appropriate. In addition, DOR Child Support Enforcement leadership, management, and staff were interviewed. Site visits were conducted in order to gain a greater understanding of Child Support's recently implemented automated management information system, as well as the day-to-day operations of the Division.

Discussions were held with selected DOR constituents in order to better understand the nature of constituent encounters with the Division. In addition, documents, records and reports were requested by the Bureau. The Bureau wishes to note the cooperative assistance of Deputy Commissioner of Child Support, the Bureau Chief for Customer Operations, and their respective staffs.

Based upon the survey responses received by the elected Representatives, a decision was made by the House Post Audit and Oversight Committee to conduct a



preliminary inquiry into the operations of DOR Child Support Enforcement Division, and its interaction with its constituents.

The Division of Child Support Enforcement, within the Department of Revenue, is codified in M.G.L. c.14:1A, which provides in pertinent part:

There shall be within the department of revenue a division of child support enforcement headed by a deputy commissioner, and such other administrative units as may be established in or assigned to said division from time to time by the commissioner. Said deputy commissioner shall be appointed by the commissioner with the approval of the secretary of administration...

"The Commissioner may appoint and remove such additional assistants, technical consultants, contractors and other persons, may engage such other technical, contractual and other assistants as the work of said division may, from time to time require, and may develop and maintain a data processing installation exclusively for the automated collection, disbursement and data systems of said division.

The Division's operations are governed by M.G.L. c.119A:1 et. seq. and applicable implementing regulations. Section 1 states:

"It is the public policy of the Commonwealth that dependent children shall be maintained, as completely as possible, from the resources of their parents, thereby relieving or avoiding, at least in part, the burden borne by the citizens of the Commonwealth."

In order to grasp the magnitude of the Commonwealth's child support enforcement operation, DOR/CSE clients number approximately 39,000, and CSE receives more than 1.7 million telephone inquiries annually relative to support questions, according to DOR/CSE. A staff whose maximum size is 40 handles this immense case volume.





## The Survey

The Bureau devised a survey to elicit information regarding constituent problems encountered within the Division of Child Support in order to both gain a better understanding of the Division and to identify any common concerns. The surveys were mailed and the survey responses were received and reviewed by the Bureau in the summer of 1998. The Representatives articulated constituent issues as well as issues about which they possessed direct knowledge.

With respect to the initial survey question, which asked the Representatives to note, by percentage, the overall increase in difficulties encountered with the collection of child support during the past two years,<sup>1</sup> the majority of the respondents estimated a 50% or more increase in difficulties within this time frame. The majority of increasing difficulties, according to the respondents, in order of scope, involved a) unresolved cases; followed by b) misapplication of payments; c) incorrect levies; d) case backlog; and e) data issues.

One of the major concerns noted by nearly all respondents involved the Child Support Enforcement Voice Response System (VRS), a so-called toll-free "hotline," a number reserved for CSE clients, and located in Wakefield (800-332-2733). It was not uncommon for a client to be placed on hold anywhere from 30 to 45 minutes on the VRS, a deficiency commonly noted among the respondents. At an October 27, 1998 meeting with the Deputy Commissioner for CSE, she stated waiting time to access the hotline has

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<sup>1</sup> See Question Number 1, *DOR Child Support Enforcement Division Survey* (attached)



been reduced from 20 to 30 minutes to an average of 2 minutes.<sup>2</sup> However, once a call has been answered, the routing of that call remains problematic, as the surveys had noted. The Deputy Commissioner stated she was committed to remedying this<sup>3</sup>. Call routing is troublesome because the call is often routed to a CSE staff member least able to aid the client. According to survey respondents interviewed by the Bureau, answers received by clients to the same question varied depending upon the staff member contacted. As recently as April, 1999, two survey respondents reported two constituent contacts to the Bureau which demonstrate more of the same in terms of lack of consistent responses. This occurrence strongly suggests an absence of VRS staff training in order to better enable them to understand agency policies and information in a consistent, uniform way.

In addition, an internal audit of CSE revealed a rather disturbing fact: eighty-six percent of CSE customers were not utilizing the Voice Response System to obtain specific case and financial information.<sup>4</sup> This underscores the need for better customer education about the VRS system in particular, and the agency in general.

CSE clients, via the survey, who noted difficulty in dealing with a CSE staffer, often described the nature of the difficulty as manifestations of stress. In those described instances, these staff behaved in a terse and unsympathetic manner, prone to rudeness toward the client, often engaging in "blaming the victim" syndrome. A number of training programs exist, designed to cope with and manage stress, reduce anger, and resolve conflict. It is understandable, given the high volume of telephone inquiries

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<sup>2</sup>In 1997, 36% of all calls received related to payment inquiry. 24% involved general inquiry. In 1996, 44% of all calls were about payment inquiry, while 17% were general inquiry. (Data furnished by CSE.)

<sup>3</sup> Meeting of October 27, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> DOR, *Office of Internal Audit Report*, December 22, 1998.





(upwards of 1.7 million annually) how stress and anger can result. Measures, in addition to the above-noted programs, ought to be instituted to reduce and control these unwanted consequences. One possible suggestion offered was rotation of hotline staff. Noteworthy here is the forthcoming agency increase in hotline staff by 70, FTE (from the 38 to 40 staff on board as of December 1998).

### **CONGRUITY BETWEEN PROBATE COURT ORDERS AND CSE'S IMPLEMENTATION**

Another difficulty observed by the respondents was a lack of congruity between the Probate Court support order and CSE's implementation of the order. Often the Probate Court orders a weekly payment schedule, which DOR ignores. DOR's Child Support Enforcement Division pays both weekly and monthly. The Bureau believes a 52-week attachment and disbursal schedule is most equitable and efficient. The following illustrations demonstrate why a 52-week payment schedule would be more appropriate.

CSE operates on a calendar month for distribution of payments under support orders, even when the court orders weekly payments. The number of support checks issued monthly is based upon the number of Fridays in a given month, according to HPAO survey respondents and CSE staff. Consider, hypothetically, if many employers pay weekly, they run afoul of the CSE system. Consider, hypothetically, that Tuesday is the record date of payment. In the month of June 1999, for example, there were five Tuesdays and four Fridays. Assume the obligor's employer garnishes \$100 from each Tuesday's payroll check, consistent with the court order, and transmits it to CSE. But



CSE pays on Fridays. So, for weeks one through four, the payment is garnished on Tuesday and paid on Friday. However, on the fifth Tuesday there is no following Friday for the month of June. Consequently, the last payment is placed on hold as an overpayment for June. Yet it grows increasingly complicated. Consider the first week of July, which begins on a Thursday. No payment is issued on the first Friday of July because no payment was recorded in the one preceding day of July. The custodial parent and the children in question must wait two weeks before they receive their next child support payment. The system will record an underpayment in July from the non-custodial parent because only four payments are received in this five-Friday month (the “missing” payment is the “overpayment” from the last week of June). CSE has stated this situation is ultimately remedied and the funds are eventually disbursed. Hypothetically, if CSE calculated its payments in weeks as ordered, no issue would exist. Fifty-two payments in 52 weeks is easier to calculate and track for all concerned when confronting a weekly order.

Nor are monthly support orders exempted from computation difficulties. Monthly payments are divided into four by CSE, the average number of weeks in a month. In a five-week month then, only four checks are issued. The recipient obligee must conserve money from these four checks since a fifth check will not be forthcoming. Many receiving these support checks do not completely understand this system. They come to rely on the weekly check and become confused when no fifth check is received in some months. The monthly order could conceivably be multiplied by twelve months then divided by 52 weeks for the correct amount.





## **OUT-OF-STATE COLLECTION OF SUPPORT PAYMENTS**

### ***25% of DOR's Child Support Caseload***

Perhaps one of the most perplexing issues confronting DOR/CSE is the collection of out-of-state support payments when the obligor resides in another jurisdiction. By DOR/CSE estimates, at least 25% of its total caseload involves out-of-state obligors. Of these cases, the majority have a known arrearage. The Family Support Act of 1988 required states to obtain Federal Health and Human Services Agency (HHS) certification, certifying that their child support enforcement systems met federal requirements. All states were to obtain this certification not later than October 1, 1997, or face the possibility of substantial financial penalties in the form of reduced federal transitional assistance. The Federal Government provided 90% of the Child Support Enforcement system's developmental cost for Massachusetts. The system was designed and developed by the Lockheed Martin Corporation. Federal funding, in toto, comprises approximately 66% of DOR/CSE's budget. Because federal welfare funds flowing to Massachusetts were in jeopardy if the new automated system was not operational within one year from the federal mandate to do so, DOR/CSE, by its own admission, noted the system was "rolled out" too early. Complicating this, according to CSE staff, was the contractor's alleged attempt to superimpose its California-developed system to Massachusetts absent any major system tailoring. Efforts aimed at system tailoring are ongoing according to CSE staff. The state's hiring freezes further complicated DOR/CSE computer implementation. A fuller discussion of the CSE automated system is presented later in this report (See p.17, "COMETS").



For present purposes, the automated system is mentioned within the context of enforcement of support orders when the obligor resides in another jurisdiction. One of the important uses of the automated system is to facilitate out-of-state collection of support payments under the Uniform Interstate Enforcement Support Act, the successor to the Uniform Reciprocal Support Act. The larger states (e.g. California, Florida, Michigan, and Texas) have experienced significant difficulties in implementing reciprocal support. One reason advanced for this is the lack of compatibility between state systems. For instance, Florida has a county-based system of enforcement whereas states in the Northeast typically have a statewide-based system. In Florida, each county's balkanized system differs from the next, further contributing to confusion and delay.

For example, an emotionally-laden and bureaucratically perplexing case involving child support enforcement in Massachusetts has continued for nearly eight years, and has involved the participation of several other social service agencies as well as DOR/CSE (i.e., the Department of Social Services (DSS) and the Department of Transitional Assistance(DTA)). This case, described below, is illustrative of the tremendous human cost exacted by a complex and often fragmented social services system and its ability to interact with child support-related consequences. The case involves a mother of seven children whose former husband has resided in Florida for most of this eight-year period and is more than \$150,000 in arrears in child support payments. The mother and her children, at the urging of a member of the HPAO Committee, met with Bureau staff. The former husband, according to the family members, physically abused the spouse and her children to the point where several of the children required hospitalization for severe





depression and suicidal ideation. Family members further stated that they literally fled in the middle of the night to escape the repeated abuse and attendant fear, and over the years have lived in various undisclosed locations. They literally fear for their lives. The mother has lived on welfare support for seven years because of the father's non-support and to ensure the provision of health insurance for her and her children. The family has sought and received services from DSS who, according to the HPAO Committee Member and the mother, threatened to split the family if the mother persisted in seeking services, a retributive rather than a healing gesture and approach. The children were clearly devoted to their mother yet the youngest child stated that he did not believe in our government's ability to protect and provide for them. The mother noted that, in her experience and to her considerable frustration, none of the agencies communicated with one another (i.e., DSS, DTA, and CSE). Consequently, no agency coordination of information or services existed. Each time the mother contacted a social service agency, according to her, she was compelled to explain her situation anew, intensifying frustration levels. The family, given the tremendous difficulties which beset it, remarkably seems to have remained intact. The father, recently taken into custody for non-payment, has paid some of the arrearage owed. The father, according to the mother, comes from a wealthy family, and earns a substantial salary in Florida, one which well positions him to honor his support obligations.

This case illustrates another issue in child support enforcement. CSE lacks the authority to compromise claims which, if existed, would facilitate the settlement of an increased number of outstanding claims. The Probate Court has exclusive jurisdiction to



compromise claims. If DOR/CSE possessed this ability, collections at least in number could increase and families could benefit.

### **INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION**

While the case just discussed is one of larger proportion than most, it nevertheless underscores the need to encourage greater multi-agency involvement and coordination where child support enforcement recipients find themselves in a position of not receiving support payments and consequently are in need of other social services. Agency-designated liaisons for DOR/CSE could serve as the point of inter-agency coordination to ensure related social service needs are met (e.g., DTA, DSS, DMH). According to CSE, as well as aides and CSE clients, child support payments are much relied upon. When they fail to be forthcoming, other social service needs as a consequence inevitably become more pronounced.

### **HPAO SURVEY RESPONSES**

The Bureau, based on issues disclosed in survey responses, selected a number of Representatives to interview at length about their encounters with DOR/CSE, their observations and recommendations. Among the issues discussed with members and their office staff:

- ◆ One of the survey recommendations urged the instituting of electronic banking for collecting and disbursing support payments. Essentially, allowing electronic collection and payment of child support could result in greater accuracy both in terms





of amount and date. Garnished wages could be directly deposited to a DOR/CSE account. Payments would then be credited to the recipient's account on the same day each week or month. Banks adhere to strict privacy regulations and would meet any DOR/CSE privacy concerns. Of particular concern is that if in a non-AFDC case an obligor pays the recipient directly, DOR has no way of determining whether or not the client has received a check. This constitutes a major issue because it occurs in more than 25% of all non-AFDC cases. The Probate Court writes the order directing the obligor to make support payments payable to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Payments are, in no instance, to be made directly to the obligee custodial parent. Once again, this occurrence underscores the need for CSE to better inform and educate its client base about support-related issues and procedures.

- ◆ Concern was expressed that DOR/CSE has, on occasion, become a "legal advisor," often jeopardizing parties' rights including those involving custody and visitation. This practice, if accurate, is entirely outside the scope of DOR/CSE's authority and must be strictly prohibited.
- ◆ A near universal perspective offered by those interviewed was the absence of client and public awareness about DOR/CSE's function. (See previous comment concerning obligor's direct payment to recipient.) CSE staff indicated discussions are ongoing as to how best to inform clients and the public at large about the child support enforcement function. The better informed citizens are, the better the level of understanding about the role and limits of this support agency. DOR/CSE, more so than the Probate Court, informs the parents about the Probate Court process. The



court, or on occasion, the Registers of Probate, will verbally explain the process.

However, this is not consistent.

- ◆ Another universal theme echoed by all those interviewed was the need to emphasize customer service as the benchmark of agency operations. Many of CSE's clients have long-term, complex, and multiple "psycho-social" needs. Sensitivity, care and compassion must be displayed by the agency toward the CSE client, according to those interviewed. At the same time, obligors in arrears require firm and swift attention.
- ◆ Miscalculation of amounts and over-charging obligors was recognized by all as a continuing computer errors issue. Further, refunding of wrongly deducted amounts is not possible.
- ◆ One of the perspectives advanced included the absence of a clear mission statement coupled with too large a caseload. Some caseworkers carry hundreds of cases. CSE management has represented to the Bureau that case backlog was reduced from 450 to 60 cases in the latter part of 1998. While many CSE employees are earnest and committed they are overworked. One CSE staffer told the Bureau that a doubling of current caseworker FTE would be of tremendous benefit in coping with an ever-escalating caseload. While greater emphasis ought to be placed upon client satisfaction, this is difficult to achieve when caseloads are too large, curtailing the amount of time a caseworker can devote to a client. Current CSE caseworkers number 465, according to DOR/CSE. Caseworker, as defined by DOR/CSE is any





worker, line or supervisory, who devotes a substantial amount of work time to direct CSE customer service.

### **DOR/CSE CUSTOMER SURVEY**

DOR/CSE contracted with a company named Workplace Solutions, at a cost of \$22,800, to conduct a customer satisfaction survey among CSE's customers. The survey, in the Bureau's opinion, is cursory and conclusory without providing adequate underlying analysis. DOR at the time of the survey possessed a database of 39,000 clients. Ten thousand three hundred ninety-nine customers were selected to receive the survey, or 26.66% of the database. The 10,399 customers represented six groups; they were:

- ◆ Custodial parents who use the Voice Response System hotline (524 responded)
- ◆ Custodial parents receiving AFDC (90 responded)
- ◆ Non-AFDC custodial parents (566 responded)
- ◆ Non-custodial voice system users (152 responded)
- ◆ Non-custodial AFDC recipients (140 responded)
- ◆ Non-custodial non-AFDC parents (341 responded).

Of the 10,399 surveys sent, 1,813 total responses were received for an overall response rate of 17.43%. However, 1,813 responses represent only 4.65% of the total DOR client database.



The survey is largely descriptive rather than analytical. Examples of responses to buttress satisfaction statements are not included. A “timely” response, for example, is not defined.<sup>5</sup> In fact, many of the survey questions call for a subjective response. The survey is redundant in parts. Terms such as “the vast majority” might have been better expressed as a percentage. The results reported ought to have included explanatory narrative in order to better illuminate the reported survey responses.

### CSE STAFFING

The CSE division previously hired temporary employees in order to reduce the time a caller awaited a response, as well as to reduce the amount of stress experienced by staff. As of December 1998, there were 38 to 40 workers to answer calls on 58 incoming lines. Within the next 90 days, 70 additional full-time employees were to be hired and dedicated exclusively to handling incoming hotline calls.

Last year, DOR consolidated, within its Problem Resolution Office (PRO), both General Tax Problem Resolution and Child Support Problem Resolution. Staff noted there are currently six PRO employees who responded to 577 cases for the month of May 1998. Of the total, 253 were tax administration unit cases, and 324 were child support enforcement unit cases.

One of the six employees is a caseworker who at the time of the interview with Bureau staff was reviewing 20 serious CSE cases. Frequently, referrals of PRO cases are made to the appropriate CSE regional office, rather than receive in-house scrutiny. The

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<sup>5</sup> (e.g. this question might have been phrased, “How many minutes do you wait for a hotline response after initially placing the call?”)





regional offices are better equipped to conduct the audits because of location of records and larger staffs. The Problem Resolution Office, among its other functions, is the office responsible for legislative liaison. The PRO attempts to deal solely with protracted cases and not with daily customer service calls.

CSE staff suggestions with respect to PRO included increasing the number of employees who have the ability to perform some elements of casework in order to increase the percentage of cases handled by PRO, i.e., estimates as high as 90% as opposed to the current 50% (as of December 1998).

### **COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS ENFORCEMENT TRACKING SYSTEM ("COMETS")**

COMETS, the automated tracking system for CSE, was implemented on December 8, 1997, replacing the existing system, the so-called "Model 2" system. As noted earlier in this report, CSE acknowledged that COMETS was "rolled out" too soon because of looming federally-mandated time frames. COMETS was 90% federally funded and was implemented in order to comply with the Federal Welfare Reform Act of 1988.

The 1988 Act imposed new burdens upon states with respect to data collection, tracking, and retrieval. Among the new requirements were complete case tracking, and the ability to interface with other social service agencies (e.g. Department of Social Services, Department of Transitional Assistance). Data about a particular case now must cover the time from case initiation to ultimate conclusion as well as all intervening events. The previous automated system, the CSE "Model 2" system, developed in the



mid-nineteen eighties, was a payment tracking system only; effective but rudimentary.

Upgrading Model 2 was not an option because this system was unable to support the new requirements. Consequently, a new system was necessary to comply with the newly imposed federal mandates.

According to a DOR Inspectional Services Division Office of Internal Audit report, dated December 22, 1998, a number of deficiencies with the system were disclosed, among them:

- ◆ An average call duration increase of 75% over the previous system; an increase of 4,000 abandoned calls over the period from May 1997 - May 1998. The report identified several factors which may have contributed to the delays:

- ⇒ Caller identification. Agents required, time and again for the caller to provide the same basic identifying information instead of relying on a PIN. The PIN identifier was eliminated when a particular type of screen, called a whisper screen, was dropped. Efforts were underway as of the date of the internal audit report to restore the whisper screen;
- ⇒ Absence of payors' names on monies collected in multiple support cases;
- ⇒ Non-functioning overview screen;
- ⇒ Delays in moving from screen to screen of 5-30 seconds per screen, slowing response times and increasing call duration;
- ⇒ Lack of ability to proceed to a desired screen directly, instead having to move through multiple screens (Representatives as well as CSE staff have noted this as well);





- ⇒ Parent social security number not retained throughout call duration when an agent has to refer to both custodial and non-custodial parental records;
- ⇒ Tasking features not yet available, requiring manual printing, handling, and sorting print-outs;
- ⇒ On-line “help” scripts are lacking, requiring off-line manual activity;
- ⇒ Unable to generate automatic transfer of income assignments. Consequently, employers were not properly withholding and submitting wage assignments relating to employees with new or modified court orders.

### **STAFF-ENCOUNTERED COMETS ISSUES**

CSE caseworkers interviewed by the Bureau reported that their manual calculations were often more accurate than those developed by COMETS. Arrearages, for example, are often incorrect. In one instance, in 21 COMETS-reported cases only one was correct, when verified manually. Arrearages, according to staff, constitute the largest percentage of their casework, be it payments in arrears or arrearage reconciliation.

The so-called “Model 2” system, the automated management information system in service prior to COMETS, was simpler for users. For example, COMETS uses multiple screens, lengthening the time necessary to access cases. Under Model 2, only two screens existed: one for AFDC and one another for non-AFDC cases. Each of these two screens was self-contained, inclusive of all necessary data. The Model 2 system exhibited other features as well, easing caseworker burdens. For example, this system



was able to read the agency "validation" number on the back of the check, tracing it to an obligor; a facility COMETS lacks.

### **LEGISLATOR INQUIRIES AND CSE RESPONSIVENESS**

In light of client and legislative problems, the HPAO Chairman recommended a course of action resulting in an agreement with DOR/CSE which will now permit DOR/CSE's Problem Resolution Office (PRO) to fully discuss a constituent's case with a legislator, a situation heretofore not possible. Once the constituent completes and executes a release, information contained in a constituent's file will be released to the legislator in question. (See Exhibit 2.) The previous practice, because of DOR's confidentiality provisions, did not allow a legislator to obtain needed case information on behalf of a CSE client, in order to aid the client in resolving issues before CSE.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the House Chairman's initiative, the Bureau urges a face-to-face meeting occur between a CSE client and CSE relevant staff for troublesome cases. This suggestion was noted during the course of the inquiry and makes a good deal of sense, especially when virtually all paper and electronic communications fail. A face-to-face meeting as a final attempt can serve as a potential remedy to management's failed attempts thus far.

The Bureau also recommends the investigation of electronic case compatibility.

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<sup>6</sup> See attached "DOR/CSE Constituent Release Form".





## CONCLUSION

CSE is a division with a difficult and complex mission. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of child support collection and enforcement. Support payments are often all that stands between the recipient family and abject poverty. Embodied in M.G.L. c.119A:1 is the expression of the public policy of the Commonwealth:

“...that the dependent children shall be maintained, as completely as possible, from the resources of their parents, thereby relieving or avoiding, at least in part, the burden borne by the citizens of the commonwealth.”

While acknowledging that government is not a panacea for all social ills, it often becomes the final repository within which to address many of them.

An enormous clientele served by less than adequate numbers of staff, working with an automated management information system not entirely responsive, and pursuing less than willing obligors creates a climate where well-meaning staff can frequently be overwhelmed. Deteriorating service is the product of this kind of environment.

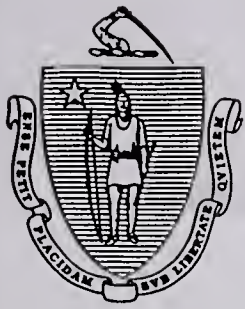
Definite themes have been articulated by those contacted during the course of this inquiry; pivotal among them: the need to be more customer-focused. Public and customer education about child support enforcement is compelling, as is the need to effectively and sensitively respond to agency callers and their concerns. Correct levies and payments and vigorous pursuit of arrearages, especially for out-of-state obligors is essential. It would appear that greater interstate cooperation and coordination is



indicated, notwithstanding the mandates expressed under the Uniform Interstate Enforcement Support Act, which have not met with major success in Massachusetts nor in other states. Internal cooperation and coordination among numerous social service agencies with CSE clients is an important objective as well.

CSE's automated management information system, "COMETS," must become more accurate, timely, and responsive (user friendly) both to internal agency needs and to customers. To achieve this, an internal agency-wide monitoring capacity must be developed to identify and remedy system shortcomings.





*The Commonwealth of Massachusetts*  
*Department of Revenue*  
*Child Support Enforcement*

FREDERICK A. LASKEY  
COMMISSIONER

AMY A. PITTER  
DEPUTY COMMISSIONER

August 6, 1999

Mr. James Tansey, Director  
House Post Audit and Oversight Bureau  
Room 146, State House  
Boston, MA 02133-1053

Dear Mr. Tansey:

Thank you very much for sending the House Post Audit and Oversight Bureau's draft preliminary report on Child Support Enforcement to me for review and comment. We agree with most of the findings and recommendations. In fact, in some areas, we have already undertaken initiatives consistent with your recommendations. Enclosed are our comments to the report.

Please feel free to call me with any further questions you may have. I can be reached at  
[REDACTED]

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Amy A. Pitter". To the right of the signature is a small circular stamp containing the letters "AP".

Amy A. Pitter  
Deputy Commissioner

cc: Frederick A. Laskey, Commissioner





**BUREAU'S RESPONSE TO DOR'S COMMENTS TO THE PRELIMINARY  
REPORT ON CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT**

The Bureau is encouraged by the cooperative efforts displayed by DOR during the course of this inquiry, and looks forward to a continuation of this spirit of cooperation.

While DOR agrees with most of our findings and recommendations, there are two areas which we particularly wish to note. The first concerns the Child Support Enforcement Division's Enforcement Tracking System (COMETS), its automated case processing and tracking system; and second, the vendor-conducted client satisfaction survey.

Because of a federal mandate with respect to compliance, DOR was compelled to "roll out" its automated case processing and tracking system (COMETS) too early. The system is admittedly very complex. DOR has added functionality and continues to work toward the overall improvement of its COMETS system. We anticipate continuing to monitor the refinements made to the system.

With respect to the client satisfaction survey, DOR is committed to commissioning a more thorough survey, with a larger population sample. We are pleased with this commitment to undertake a survey involving a greater statistically significant sample. The Bureau will monitor developments here as well.



**MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE  
COMMENTS TO HOUSE POST AUDIT & OVERSIGHT BUREAU  
DRAFT REPORT ON CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT**

***FINDING 1: DOR currently lacks authority to compromise support claims; this is currently the exclusive province of the Probate Court.***

**RECOMMENDATION: DOR/CSE should be given the authority to compromise support claims in order to facilitate the collection and payment of support.**

Currently, DOR does settle a small number of public assistance debts. This activity has been limited due to the need to ensure that settlement negotiations are grounded in objective and quantifiable criteria, and the need to receive approval from the federal government, since they are entitled to their share (50%). However, DOR agrees that in some cases settlement of a child support debt is an appropriate method to collect an arrearage, and is developing a program to facilitate debt compromise in all cases where it is appropriate.

In addition, it is important to note that we have no flexibility to settle non-public assistance debt without the explicit consent of the custodial parent. Child support debt is a judgment by operation of law and a lien in favor of the obligee that cannot be modified or reduced retroactively, neither the courts nor DOR may forgive a debt owed to a custodial parent without that party's consent.

Recently, however, the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement clarified their position by stating that child support agencies may compromise child support debts in accordance with rules governing settlement of judgments. PIQ-99-03 (3/2/99). Given the Federal government's revised position, DOR now believes it can more freely compromise debt even in the absence of explicit statutory authority to do so. DOR is developing criteria to guide decisions about compromising debts which will facilitate settlement of public assistance arrears as a collection tool while ensuring fairness and consistency of treatment.

***FINDING 2: DOR/CSE obligors in 25% of non-AFDC cases make payments directly to custodial parent in violation of the standard probate court order.***

**RECOMMENDATION: DOR/CSE should through public awareness as well as other means ensure that payments in non-AFDC cases are made to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and not directly to the custodial parent.**

We agree that DOR can increase public awareness regarding the requirement that child support be paid through DOR. Currently, DOR representatives are present in all but the most remote probate court locations every day. They make applications and other forms available to litigants and explain the DOR child support collection process. However, the Department is working to be more proactive.

DOR is developing a program to conduct regular interviews with customers when we see them in court. The interviews will be designed to provide more information to our customers about the DOR payment process. DOR will also continue to explore other avenues for public outreach.







Beginning in 1999, all new child support wage assignments must be paid through DOR and employers are authorized to remit all wage assigned child support payments to DOR. Direct payments from obligors to custodial parents will be less frequent as a result of this requirement.

***FINDING 3: DOR/CSE does not utilize electronic banking as a means to collect and disburse support payments.***

**RECOMMENDATION:** DOR/CSE should consider instituting electronic banking for collection and disbursement of support payments to ensure greater certainty of payments as well as their accuracy. This could be especially helpful for garnished wages, allowing the employer to deposit directly into the CSE designated bank account.

DOR agrees with this recommendation and is making substantial progress toward implementation. Direct deposit will be a major convenience to custodial parents. The agency, therefore, assembled a project team which has prepared detailed systems specifications for this project which will be implemented in FY 2000.

Incoming electronic funds transfer is also well on its way to completion. DOR amended its contract with Lockheed IMS to require a program for electronic receipt of payments. Marketing materials and supporting software have been developed and technical arrangements have been finalized with DOR's depository bank. DOR has established an FY 2000 goal of implementing electronic funds transfer with the 50 largest employers of non-custodial parents. We also hope to target other employers who are already forwarding tax payments to DOR via electronic means.

***FINDING 4: DOR is currently unable to refund incorrectly deducted obligor amounts.***

**RECOMMENDATION:** DOR/CSE should develop a mechanism to allow refunding of incorrectly deducted amounts for obligors.

The Child Support Enforcement Division's automated data processing system (known as COMETS) does include functionality which permits authorized financial staff to issue refunds of amounts wrongfully withheld. In addition, the Division maintains an offline process which facilitates manual issuance of a check to aid in quick resolution of problem cases.

However, pursuant to federal law, DOR only refunds amounts that were "improperly withheld" by wage assignment. 45 CFR s.303.100(a)(8). DOR has interpreted "improperly withheld" to mean that DOR knew or should have known the correct amount to withhold. In cases in which DOR did not know and could not reasonably be expected to have known the correct amount to withhold, federal law does not require DOR to refund the amount to the obligor. If, for example, an obligor went to court and obtained a reduction in his support order, but failed to notify DOR, and DOR, therefore, continued to collect and disburse the original amount, DOR would not refund the money to the obligor. DOR would, however, credit the obligor's arrears balance with amounts sent to the custodial parent that exceeded the new court order amount. If no arrears exist, DOR will sometimes terminate the child support order early to offset any excess payments.





***FINDING 5: DOR/CSE lacks a uniform payment disbursement policy. Some payments are disbursed weekly, while others are disbursed monthly.***

**RECOMMENDATION:** DOR/CSE ought to decide on a uniform calendar for child support payment disbursements. A 52 week calendar seems to satisfy both Probate Court orders which may be written mandating weekly payments, as well as DOR/CSE preferences for monthly payments (i.e., the monthly order could be multiplied by twelve and then divided by 52).

Distribution of child support payments is one of the most complex aspects of the child support enforcement program. This is largely because DOR, like all other child support agencies in the nation, must comply with federal statutory and regulatory distribution requirements. These rules require child support agencies to:

- convert child support order into monthly amount due in TAFDC and Foster Care cases to facilitate federal reimbursement;
- apply all child support payments received in a month to current support owed for that month until the obligation for the month is fully satisfied before applying any payments to past due support (except IRS tax intercept payments that must be paid to arrears);
- conform all wage-assigned support orders to the employer's payroll frequency;
- disburse support collections within two days of receipt (DOR generally disburses current support collections payments within 24 hours of receipt, whether the payment is made weekly, monthly, every other week, twice per month, or ad hoc).

Because families move frequently on and off the public assistance rolls, and the Federal Government requires that public assistance cases be charged monthly, DOR decided to convert all orders to a monthly amount. The alternative would be a costly overhaul of COMETS which would, in essence, have two separate and distinct financial infrastructures – one for public assistance and one for non-public assistance cases.

We recognize that compliance with these requirements has sometimes been confusing to our customers (i.e., cases in which the total amount due for a particular period is received via multiple checks). We are taking steps to enhance COMETS in order to bring greater consistency for many families. DOR has established an FY2000 goal to identify new ways to simplify the complex distribution rules to better serve our families.

***FINDING 6: DOR/CSE has encountered and continues to encounter difficulties in the collection of out-of-state support payments, especially among the larger states.***

**RECOMMENDATION:** DOR/CSE should increase its efforts to facilitate the collection of support payments from out-of-state obligors. Strategies need to be devised for this purpose, especially with states that have proven most problematic (e.g. Florida, California).

Massachusetts is not alone in its struggle to enforce child support obligations across state lines; in fact, interstate cases have long posed the greatest challenge to America's child support enforcement system. Almost a third of all child support cases are interstate – defined as a case where the custodial parent is in one state, and the non-custodial parent is in the another state. Yet nationwide, a mere 10% of all child support collections come from interstate cases.





Federal Welfare Reform legislation enacted in 1996 (Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act) made important changes to interstate case processing. The new requirements will, as they are implemented across the country, improve success rates in interstate cases. These changes include:

- All states must adopt and use the Uniform Interstate Family Support Act
- All states must give the federal government data about obligors and assets
- Child Support agencies have expanded access to data collected and maintained by the federal government (via Expanded Federal Parent Locator Service, National Directory of New Hires, Federal Case Registry, federal agency data, among others)
- Child Support agencies are equipped with broader range of enforcement remedies to collection support across state lines (such as Multistate Financial Institution Data Match, Direct Income Withholding, Direct Asset Seizure, Administrative Enforcement for Interstate cases)
- States must develop and use CSENet, a nationwide communications system designed to facilitate referral of and response to interstate requests.

DOR has begun instituting these requirements. We are already exchanging data with the National Directory of New Hires and will this year pilot Administrative Enforcement for Interstate cases and will participate in the Multistate Financial Institution Data Match. It will take some time before these changes are fully implemented across the country. As states begin using new interstate tools, however, we should see marked improvement in interstate enforcement.

***FINDING 7: DOR/CSE Commonwealth of Massachusetts Enforcement Tracking System ("COMETS") continues to experience difficulties causing it to be less than fully supportive of DOR/CSE's mission.***

**RECOMMENDATION: DOR/CSE ought to intensify its efforts to make COMETS more user responsive and operate in a manner which supports and facilitates the agency mission.**

We agree with this finding. COMETS is a large, complex, automated case processing and tracking system capable of meeting federal mandates and agency business requirements. Its predecessor, Model II, was admittedly a simpler system, but could not comply with recent federal and state requirements. Since initial implementation of COMETS, DOR has steadily improved functionality to make COMETS more effective. As a result, severe problem logs have decreased from 330 in June, 1998, to 14 now. We added functionality, including: enhanced interface between COMETS and the VRS; new data elements, reports, screens, and navigation paths to make COMETS more user-friendly; revised customer service overview screen containing key case data to enhance responsiveness during phone inquiries; federal and state case registries; and data exchanges with the federal government. We improved automated enforcement processes, including lottery and tax refund intercepts, bank levy, penalty and interest assessment, and generation of administrative income assignments, and thus realized increased collections.

Refinement of COMETS to fully support our mission is by no means complete. We have created a COMETS 2000 development plan detailing the projects we will undertake to ensure that the system will better support and facilitate the mission of the Child Support Enforcement Division.





***FINDING 8: DOR/CSE's client satisfaction survey, conducted by a consultant, is less than adequate.***

**RECOMMENDATION: DOR/CSE should commission a more thorough client satisfaction survey, with a larger population sample.**

We agree with this finding. Specifically, we agree it would be beneficial to commission a new customer satisfaction survey. In addition, DOR has already taken steps to resolve issues identified in the survey. For example, DOR initiated efforts to manage the large volume of calls received at its Customer Service Bureau. Among the actions taken were a 213 % staff increase (from 24 to 75 FTEs) and an expansion of training programs. Results include:

- Reduction in average call response time from 16.5 minutes to less than a minute;
- Increase in average number of calls answered daily from 1,043 to 2,519;
- Decrease in average number of calls abandoned daily from 36% to 11.6%; and
- Decrease in average call duration from 6.34 to 4.5 minutes.

In addition, DOR's customers have become more familiar with the Customer Service Voice Response System (VRS) and are using the VRS to obtain information without speaking directly with customer service staff. Average daily calls to the VRS increased from 6,097 last June to 9,836 this June. In fact, approximately 70 % of the calls to the Customer Service Bureau are handled now via the VRS system with no human intervention.

Several organizational changes are underway with the goal of further improving customer service. The changes will streamline the process for resolving problems and responding to inquiries. DOR remains committed to conducting in-house quality assurance audits on a regular basis.

***FINDING 9: The DOR/CSE lacks the capacity to coordinate the delivery of social services to its clients, as well as ensuring adequate information exchange among these social service agencies.***

**RECOMMENDATION: DOR/CSE should strongly consider designating interagency liaisons to coordinate information as well as the delivery of social services to CSE clients from among the Commonwealth's social service agencies including DMH, DTA, and DSS.**

DOR's goal is to promote economic stability for children and families by ensuring that, to the extent possible, parents provide for the financial needs of their children. While DOR is not a social service agency, it works with customers who are often receiving assistance from a variety of other agencies responsible for providing social services.

DOR collects support; other agencies attend to different quality of life issues, including housing, health care, and the like. As noted in the HPAO report, ideally, state agencies would coordinate efforts to ensure smooth service delivery to families. For a variety of reasons, including incompatible computer systems, limited staff and divergent missions, case-by-case coordination is often difficult.





DOR continues, however, to improve coordination with other agencies. DOR has interagency liaisons with the Division of Transitional Assistance (DTA), Division of Medical Assistance (DMA), Department of Public Health (DPH), Division of Employment and Training (DET), the Trial Court Department and the offices of various District Attorneys. DOR and DTA staff liaisons meet regularly to conference cases and executive staff of DOR and DTA meet monthly to address policy and service delivery issues. In addition, DOR is mandated to enter into cooperative agreements with courts and law enforcement officials. DOR has had cooperative agreements with DTA and the Trial Court since the late 1980's and the early 1990's, respectively. In addition, DOR has cooperative agreements with the Department of Public Health (DPH), the Division of Employment and Training (DET), the Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) and seven District Attorneys located throughout Massachusetts. DOR is also pursuing cooperative agreements with DSS and DMA and the Criminal History System Board (CHSB). The purpose of these agreements is to define agency coordination that supports effective operation of the child support program.

***FINDING 10: DOR/CSE lacks sufficient training programs for its staff around mission and function as well as stress reduction for hotline workers.***

**RECOMMENDATION: DOR/CSE should continue and expand programs for hotline staff, aimed at reducing stress and improving conflict resolution skills.**

DOR agrees with this recommendation. We have a strong commitment to improve the quality of service provided to our customers through staff training. We constantly review and revise training programs based on current staff needs. In FY99, each Child Support Enforcement Division staff member received an average of 9 days of training (an increase of 1 day over FY98).

To address the particular experiences of customer service staff, in FY99, DOR initiated a Professional Development curriculum that addresses telephone skills, talking to customers who have difficult problems, and ergonomics. This program will be continued in FY2000 with enhancements to modules on stress and conflict management. DOR has also increased efforts to provide staff with written material to support them day to day. Scripts to aid staff in responding to telephone calls now appear on DOR's intranet. Work is also underway on a comprehensive COMETS training course and on one-page reference guides to help staff navigate some of the most used COMETS processes.

***FINDING 11: DOR/CSE lacks a client information initiative to inform about CSE's mission and function.***

**RECOMMENDATION: DOR/CSE should undertake a client information program to make CSE clients aware of CSE's mission and function.**

DOR agrees that every opportunity should be taken to inform the public about the mission and function of the Child Support Enforcement Division. Child support enforcement is often a complex and difficult process for our customers and DOR is committed to ongoing efforts to provide clear, accurate information to customers.





DOR communicates with customers often. All first time customers to DOR receive letters advising them of the services DOR does, and does not, provide. The letters and information mailed to customers during the life of a case are drafted to provide information in a "customer friendly" manner. DOR's outreach initiatives include programs aimed at helping young and first-time fathers understand the financial and emotional obligations that come with parenthood. In FY2000, DOR will expand efforts to make employment resources available to non-custodial parents. DOR maintains a CSE web site on the Internet that includes information about the CSE program and an "on-line" application for services. DOR continues to expand its library of brochures and other written material explaining the child support program.

DOR's efforts to enhance customer service by improving the quality of information provided to customers are ongoing. DOR can best serve its customers when customers are knowledgeable about DOR's child support mission and services.

***FINDING 12: DOR/CSE'S Problem Resolution Office is understaffed.***

**RECOMMENDATION: DOR/CSE should consider augmenting the staff of its Problem Resolution Office (PRO), to enable it to handle a larger percentage of cases.**

DOR agrees with this recommendation and will soon post 2 new child support positions for the Problem Resolution Office.

For the record, we would like to take this opportunity to clarify the statistics in the HPAO report. The report states that the entire Problem Resolution Office is staffed with 6 employees. In fact, there are 23 PRO employees, including 12 tax examiners, 7 child support staff, and 4 special research staff. The case statistics cited in the report for the month of May are also not accurate. The total number of cases completed by PRO staff in May was 487 - 253 tax cases and 234 child support cases. There may have been some confusion because while the cases were being worked, another 295 child support cases came into PRO, resulting in an outstanding inventory of 324 cases at the end of May.

***Point of Clarification regarding staffing numbers:***

On page 4, the report states, "DOR/CSE clients number approximately 39,000, and CSE receives more than 1.7 million telephone inquiries annually relative to support questions, according to CSE. A staff whose maximum size is 40 handles this immense call volume."

While DOR does receive roughly 1.7 million calls per year, we would like to clarify the other statistics cited in this section. DOR has approximately 110,000 cases. DOR staff dedicated to handling child support cases number 500 FTEs. 75 of these FTEs are assigned to handle telephone calls that come into the Customer Service center and the other 425 staff are responsible for establishing, modifying and enforcing support orders and handling complex child support issues that cannot be addressed over the telephone.



# **DOR CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT**

## **EXHIBITS**

1. DOR Child Support Enforcement Division Survey
2. Department of Revenue Constituent Services  
Authorization Form



**DOR CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT DIVISION**  
**SURVEY**

(Outline)

**Introduction:**

I. Statutory basis for Child Support Enforcement (CSE). Brief description of how other states collect child support, e.g., many states delegate this authority to the Attorney General or the local District Attorney, who in turn contracts with private vendors (Lockheed, Maximus).

II. Statement about:

It has come to the attention of the House Post Audit and Oversight Committee (HPAOC) that a number of House members have voiced concern about constituents' increasing problems with CSE, especially in non-AFDC cases.

As a result, HPAOC, through its Bureau, has designed the survey which follows to allow us to better understand the dimension of the problem.

We would greatly appreciate your cooperation with this by completing or having your staff complete the survey. Based on its results, the HPAO Bureau will design an action plan to conduct a performance audit of Child Support Enforcement. The Bureau will keep your individual responses confidential and will only release aggregate information.

Please respond within two weeks from receipt. Thank you.





**DOR CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT DIVISION**  
**SURVEY**

1. Have your constituents reported an increase in problems with collection of child support within the last two years? If so, what would you estimate this increase to be: (please circle one)

- a) 10%      b) 20%      c) 30%      d) 40%      e) 50% or more

2. What does the increase in problems involve? (Check all that are applicable)

- a) unresolved cases
- b) case backlogs
- c) incorrect levies
- d) misapplication of payments
- e) data problems
- f) other (please elaborate)

3. Have your constituents encountered problems with Department of Revenue responsiveness? If so, please comment. Are all of your communications responded to in a timely fashion?



4. What is the approximate average time from notice to DOR by a constituent to actual collection of child support? What about the approximate time for problems being identified, to actual correction?

5. Do your constituents report recurring or similar problems with child support enforcement? If so, please comment on the most frequently occurring reported problems.

6. Do your constituents note any problems with the Probate Courts concerning enforcement of a child support order? If so, please comment. Does DOR take any actions inconsistent with court orders? Explain.

7. What do your constituents suggest in improving the overall child support enforcement process? Please comment.

8. What do you, as a Representative, consider the most serious areas of concern with CSE? Please comment.





9. What action would you, as a Representative, recommend to improve the operation of the Department of Revenue Child Support Enforcement? Please comment.

10. Do you wish to offer any additional comments?

Thank you very much for your time. Your responses will aid the Bureau greatly in designing an action plan for a performance audit.

survey





*The Commonwealth of Massachusetts*

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1054

**JAMES H. FAGAN**  
3RD BRISTOL DISTRICT  
26 DEAN STREET  
TAUNTON, MA 02780  
TEL. (508) 824-7000

Chairman  
Committee on  
Post Audit and Oversight

STATE HOUSE, ROOM 146  
TEL. (617) 722-2575

December 9, 1998

**DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE CONSTITUENT SERVICES**

Dear Colleague:

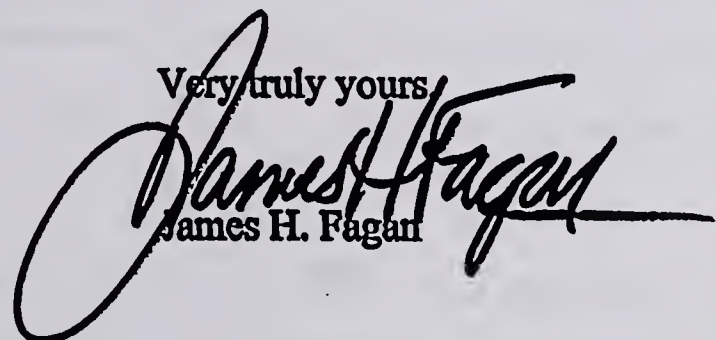
I am sure you are aware that one continuing problem that members have faced in dealing with the Department of Revenue on behalf of constituents has been the "great wall of silence", as the most universal complaint from legislators has been the refusal of DOR to discuss the details of any individual or constituent problem even with the referring legislator due to confidentiality provisions.

In order to address this issue, the Post Audit Committee has recently reached an agreement with the Department of Revenue in which DOR will fully and openly discuss a constituent's case once the constituent has completed and signed a release form that authorizes the release of such information to the named legislator. For your convenience, I am enclosing a copy of the release form.

I would greatly appreciate it if you would keep my office advised as to whether or not problems continue to exist in dealing with the Department of Revenue.

Best personal regards.

Very truly yours,

  
James H. Fagan

JHF: ed  
Enclosure







Department of Revenue  
Problem Resolution Office  
PO BOX 9682, BOSTON, MA 02114-9682

BERNARD F. CROWLEY, JR.  
ACTING COMMISSIONER  
JOHN F. MOYNIHAN  
DEPUTY COMMISSIONER

AUTHORIZATION

I hereby authorize the release and disclosure to my representative,

\_\_\_\_\_, whose office or residence is at \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_, of the records and information identified below  
which are maintained by the Child Support Enforcement Division of the Department of Revenue  
and pertain to my child support case with \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of other parent, legal guardian, or child(ren)

Please check one:

- ☐ Release all records and information.
- ☐ Release only those records or information pertaining to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Release all records and information except the following: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

SS#: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_







